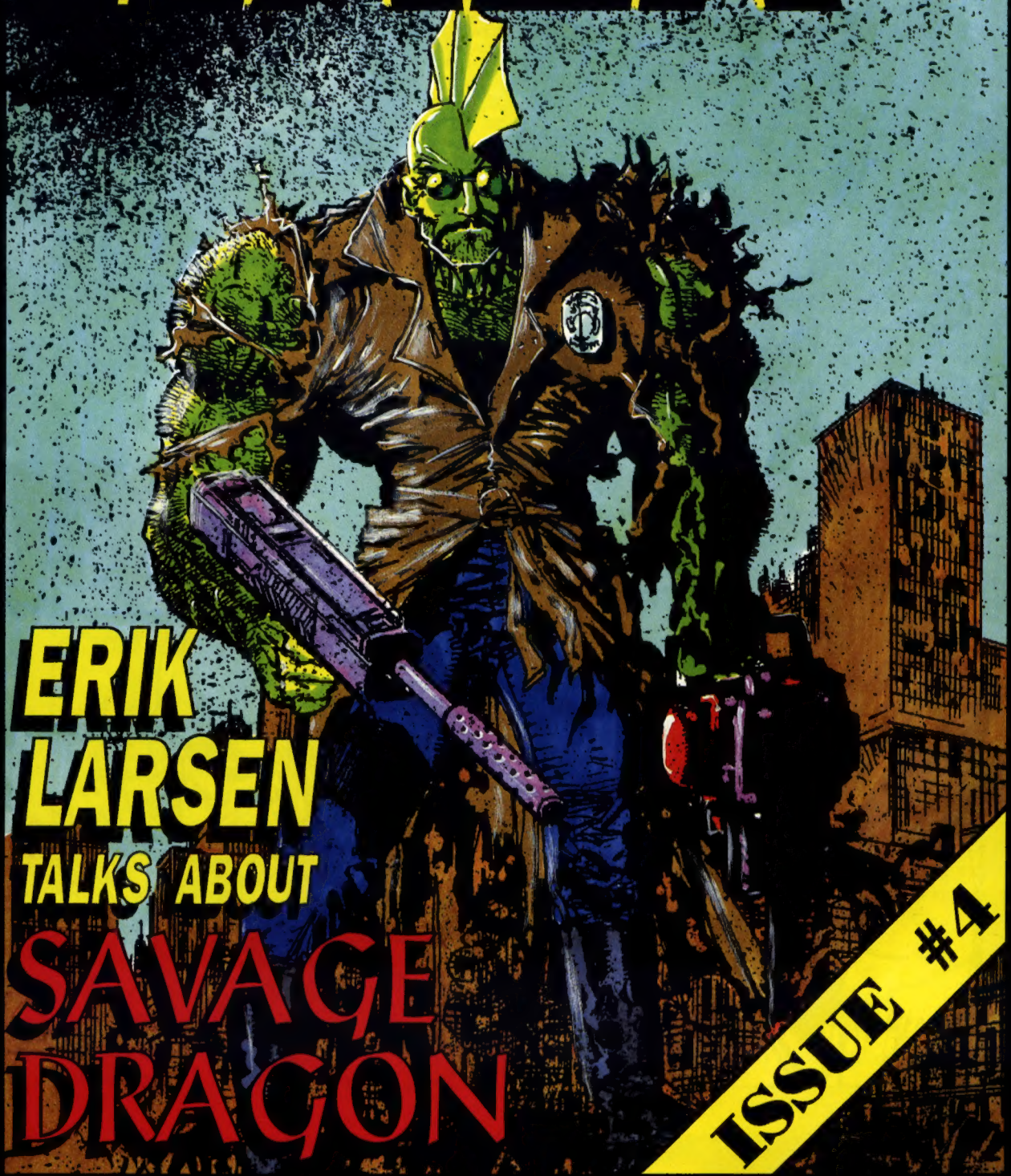
COMIC TALK #4 ○ JUNE 1993 ○ $2.50

COMIC TALK™



ERIK LARSEN TALKS ABOUT SAVAGE DRAGON

ISSUE #4

COMIC TALK

VOLUME 1 - NO. 4
JUNE - 1993

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Printed in the USA.

INTRODUCTION

At this stage of the game, Erik Larsen hardly needs an introduction. He came onto the professional comics scene a handful of years ago after creating his own home brewed books since early childhood. His first professional job - at AC comics - firmly established his in your face style and helped him break into the mainstream.

It was his work on *Amazing Spider-Man*, however, that brought Larsen to the forefront of the industry. For the first time, his dynamic layouts shined through. His editors began asking for his input on the direction of the stories, character designs, even picking his inkers, whom he often felt buried his pencils.

Larsen's stay at Marvel culminated with his six part *Spider-Man* serial, 'Revenge of the Sinister Six', which he also wrote. It was around that time that he and six other Marvel mega-stars decided they wanted to move on. As a founding member of Image Comics, Erik launched *The Savage Dragon* mini-series, a story about a big, green cop with a finhead and an attitude. Now Larsen is poised to break new ground as *The Savage Dragon* ongoing series debuts in June. And that's just the tip of the iceberg, Freak Force, a team appearing in *Savage Dragon*, will spin-off into their own series, Super-Patriot is getting a miniseries, and Vangard is coming back.

Erik Larsen is a busy guy.

I caught up with him in late January and was impressed with his straightforwardness. He pulls no punches and is ready to name names (as you will soon see). Here's a guy who grew up reading and loving comics and is now in a perfect position to infect us with his enthusiasm. Read on.

Brian Pulido

ERIK:

"[FREAK FORCE HAS] A WHOLE NEW BEND TO IT THAT IS REAL DIFFERENT FROM WHAT'S GONE ON BEFORE IN SUPER-HERO COMICS."

Brian Pulido: Now that the Savage Dragon miniseries has come to a close, you've announced that The Dragon will become a monthly. When is that going to be happening?

Erik Larsen: June.

BP: What can we look forward to in the new series?

EL: (laughs) Geez, if I could figure that part out I'd be off and running.

BP: I know you know a little more than you're letting on.

EL: What I'm trying to do is set up this other team that's going to eventually be springing out of The Dragon book.

BP: Freak Force?

EL: Freak Force, yeah. That's going to be an ongoing thing for the first half of the year in The Savage Dragon, dealing with the formation of that team and bringing some characters back. Some characters have barely been in it, like Mighty Man but he will be much more of a key player and will be part of Freak Force.

BP: At the end of #3, you said Mighty Man is coming back. When I read the miniseries, I was thinking, well this guy's pretty dead. What's going to happen?

EL: There's a transfer of some powers. So we get to deal with a whole new person being Mighty Man and dealing with the super powers and stuff like that. It will be a new Mighty Man who looks just like the old Mighty Man for the most part.

BP: A more current attitude?

EL: Yeah, definitely it will be a more current attitude but just because of the person who is the new Mighty Man. It's got a whole new bend to it that is real different from what's gone on before in super-hero comics. I think it's pretty interesting.

BP: Is the new Mighty Man anybody we've already seen in Savage Dragon?

EL: No comment.

BP: I spoke to Rob Haynes and he said that Star will be a back-up story in the Dragon.

EL: Yeah. There's a bunch of characters that I've created

either years ago or recently that I'd like to develop but quite frankly, I'm not really able to write, pencil and ink 24 pages a month. I'm just not fast enough to do that, which is kind of too bad on one hand but on the other hand that means that we get to have some cool backups by some good guys.

BP: Who's going to be working with you?

EL: Adam Hughes is doing a ten-pager which will feature two characters from Freak Force at this point called Ricochet and Rapture. He's also doing the Dragon Annual.

BP: That's sounds cool.

EL: A lot of the stuff is just dealing with getting Freak Force sort of solidified so that it can go off on it's own. I would say at least the first half of the year everything is going to be introducing new characters every issue who will be key to stuff that's going to be coming up later on. I've actually created a lot of stuff in years past dealing with the Dragon and his universe and all the different characters that are there and they're all sitting around in my sketchbook and various other places. It's just a matter of can I introduce all this stuff so I can get it to a point where I recognize it a little more. Right now, it's essentially ten ongoing characters in the book right now with just the Dragon, Frank, Frank's wife, and Debbie. By the time this interview comes out Debbie will be dead.

BP: Poor Debbie. She gets abused, her mother's treating her rotten. Where does she get aced?

EL: She meets Zero. It's a morning after story and she gets blown away.

BP: She didn't last, but these things happen.

EL: These things happen and part of establishing the universe and the neighborhood is to show the kind of stuff that goes on and the troubles that the main character has in going through all this stuff.

BP: I guess there has to be a lot of stress on him, he's really on the line of fire. I like your approach. I just love the idea that this guy's a cop and at the end of the day he's got to account for himself. There has to be a cause and effect to all this nastiness that's happening.

EL: He'll be going through a lot of changes, both emotionally and physically. By the time we get around to the ongoing series, he'll have a long handlebar moustache, be unshaven and look pretty seedy.

BP: Why's that? Is he having a hard time handling things?

EL: He's having a hard time dealing with people around him getting blown away and with Frank and his involvement with the Vicious Circle.

BP: What's with Frank at the end of #3? He just looked like he had seen a ghost.

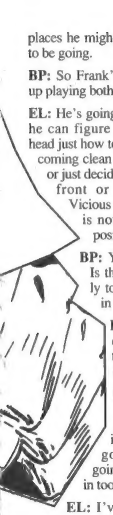
EL: Frank's in a very difficult situation right now cause he's got to weigh a couple different things. Does he really want the dragon to be on the police force, to fight guys like the vicious circle? [Not having the Dragon do that isn't the best situation either.] And then there's the fact that he's not really in charge of the police force. He's the Dragon's best friend in the force. He can't really tell the Dragon that he's got to go here and there. So he's got sort of limited power. The Vicious Circle, on the other hand, has their own agenda. They have stuff they want to have accomplished and so Frank, at least in the beginning, is going to complicate the Dragon's life by getting him to go

"I'VE ACTUALLY CREATED A LOT OF STUFF IN YEARS PAST DEALING WITH THE DRAGON AND HIS UNIVERSE AND ALL THE DIFFERENT CHARACTERS THAT ARE THERE AND THEY"RE ALL SITTING AROUND IN MY SKETCHBOOK AND VARIOUS OTHER PLACES."

places he might not really want to be going.

BP: So Frank's going to wind up playing both sides?

EL: He's going to have to until he can figure out in his own head just how to deal with either coming clean with the Dragon or just deciding to either confront or challenge the Vicious Circle, which he is not in a real good position to be doing.



BP: Yeah that's true. Is that storyline likely to come to a head in the first year?

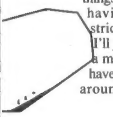
EL: Yeah. It'll definitely come to a head in the first year.

BP: Frank's an engaging character. All his intentions are good, but he's going to get himself in too deep.

EL: I've gotten letters saying, "boy this guy's really nasty, he's a villain." I don't think of him in that way at all. I think of Frank as being the ultimate good guy. He's trying to do right. Somehow or other in his trying to mend things and make things work they've gotten way out of hand.

BP: I agree. That's a unique position for a character in comics. They're usually good or bad but poor Frank, he's caught right in the middle doing what he can for good.

EL: A lot of times when I'm writing this stuff, I like to kind of just do it issue by issue and see where it goes. A lot of things come out of not having it be a real strict script format. I'll just go, well wait a minute, the villains have all these people around them, why don't they just pick them up and throw them? That came off when I was drawing the actual page rather than it being in a script that was nailed down that this was going to happen.



BP: So you could surprise yourself every time you look at a page. You might be discovering it right then?

EL: Yeah. I want this stuff to be a lot more spontaneous and a lot less plot conscious.

BP: You have enough subplots in #3. How about the older lady who took a look at the TV set and in the foreground there was a little shot of that dude with the green mohawk.

EL: Rodney. Yeah. She'll be coming into the series relatively soon, probably not within the first couple of issues. She's off someplace else and has somewhat limited funds. I'm not even sure what the relationship is between her and the kid in the picture. I haven't quite decided if he's a grandson or what exactly.

BP: That must have spawned a lot of letters. I'm dying to know more about The Dragon. There's a lot of interesting tidbits that lead me in one direction, then into another and it's fun discovering it. Is there anything you want to let us know, a little tidbit maybe?

EL: No. (laughs) I'm just having some fun playing with it.

BP: That's perfectly understandable. It's great telling people no, I can't tell you that yet. It keeps us coming back for more. Dragon seems to be a man about town, he's got a lot of women in his life. It seems like things could happen with for example the police officer, Ms. Wild, Amanda Mills, Nurse Stephens. What's going on with that?

EL: Hey, he's a friendly guy. A lot of people don't really quite

"I'VE GOTTEN LETTERS SAYING, 'BOY THIS GUY'S REALLY NASTY, HE'S A VILLAIN.' I DON'T THINK OF HIM IN THAT WAY AT ALL. I THINK OF FRANK AS BEING THE ULTIMATE GOOD GUY."

catch onto is that he's a good looking guy. If you're just looking at his features, he's a fairly handsome fellow.

BP: Yeah, he's got that big V-taper.

EL: He's built to all hell.

BP: Exactly. And his cool shades. They're really wild.

EL: A lot of the stuff, especially in issue #3, was more read into. The Amanda Mills thing, she's definitely hot for his bones and Debbie Harris is definitely hot for his bones. Nurse Stephens is more of a sympathetic character. She's a high-strung woman who keeps seeing all this crap happening being in the hospital. She was there when Mighty Man kicked the bucket and when Dragon was dragged in in horrible shape. She keeps seeing all the destruction what the Vicious Circle and other super-villains are leaving behind. She's just high-strung and looking for a shoulder to cry on basically. I wasn't really thinking of her as being a potential love interest although that's possible.

BP: What about Miss Wild? What was up with her and the police officer?

EL: That will be lead up to for a while. That might or might not develop. I'm still vacillating on that because I kind of like the semi-adversarial relationship that[miss wild and the police officer are] in. She likes to tell him what to do and I kind of like that. I like the dynamic they've got going where it's like, well we're kind of interested in each other, but we're not really going to come right out and say it or do anything.

"I KIND OF LIKE THE SEMI-ADVERSARIAL RELATIONSHIP THAT [MISS WILD AND THE POLICE OFFICER ARE] IN. SHE LIKES TO TELL HIM WHAT TO DO AND I KIND OF LIKE THAT."

BP: I guess some sort of major event would have to happen to bring them together, wouldn't it?

EL: Yeah. I don't know what analogy I could draw there. I was thinking of Hawkeye/Hot Lips but that might not be the best one.

BP: I noticed that Vicious Circle seems to have their fingers in a lot of areas. They even dissed Cyberdata when they blew the deal in #2. They seem to have a degree of power. Do they have more power in terms of influence in the underworld than you've let on?

EL: Basically, they are the mob in Chicago.

BP: Yeah. They really dissed Cyberdata and I figure she's a force to reckon with too.

EL: Yeah. Well that's something that I would like to deal with. I like Mark Silvestri and I like all those characters.

BP: They are a bunch of fun characters.

EL: There are some neat visual stuff that he's got going on with some of those guys.

BP: He's the guy to watch for all that wild energy matter running all over the place.

EL: I love his stuff. Mark's one of my faves. The Vicious Circle have taken over from where the mob was. They are the new mob. They are the super-powered mob. The other mob couldn't stay in power because they couldn't challenge these guys. They've got super powers and the super-powered guys can do whatever the hell they want.

BP: A little tidbit—just for the readers.

EL: Overlord is an old mafioso. At one point he realized that he was being put out of business, so he went to Cyberdata to get himself this suit built so that he could be a super-freak, even though underneath it all he's still a regular guy.

BP: I've read The Dragon and I really dig it. I'm reading most of the Image books and enjoying them. I'm wondering if you guys are going to get around to the idea of exploring how does everybody get power? Was there one event that triggered something? Are they mutants?

EL: I'm not sure that we can ever really get together. (laughs) Because of the nature of the company, everybody owns their own stuff and can do pretty much whatever the hell they want with it. It's fairly hard to get together to impose things on other people by saying well these are the rules and this is the way it's got to be. We're trying to have things be more lucid than that and more open. For the most part, the characters in this book are what you would call mutants. I don't think Star has

"BECAUSE OF THE NATURE OF THE COMPANY, EVERYBODY OWNS THEIR OWN STUFF AND CAN DO PRETTY MUCH WHATEVER THE HELL THEY WANT WITH IT."

Barbaric from the 1st issue of Freak Force - by Erik Larsen.

any super-powers at all. He's more like Batman or Iron Fist.

BP: Peak human condition?

EL: Yeah, peak human condition. Those great fighting skills.

BP: Years spent in isolation training or what-have-you.

EL: All that crap, anyway, he's doing all that kind of stuff.

BP: In the Splash in #3 you introduced this guy, Inferno. He lasted all of four pages against the Dragon, but I thought he looked very cool. Are we ever going to see him again?

EL: Most of these characters will be seen again in some form. He has, at this point, been hauled off to jail, but eventually I'm going to be dealing with some of the characters who are already in jail possibly testifying against Overlord and getting it to the point where he's actually accountable for something so that he could be arrested. At this point the Dragon can't really storm the skyscraper and kick the crap out of the guy, whether that's possible or not. He doesn't really have anything concrete to charge this guy with.

"I CREATED THE DRAGON AROUND FOURTH GRADE... I ALWAYS WAS DRAWING.

BP: Yeah he's real shifty.

EL: He's pretty much been letting other people do the stuff and not really doing anything outright to get himself in trouble.

BP: So is he going to develop as a major super villain? Will he become the arch enemy or have we yet to meet Dragon's arch enemy?

EL: I like to think of that stuff as developing as the series goes on. At this point he's been in my mind as sort of one of the most major arch villains for the Dragon but there are a couple of others that I had drawn as a kid that will be coming back in some form or another. All this stuff gets revised so much that it's kind of unrecognizable from what I had before, but it's still in my mind.

BP: I read the chronology of events on the Dragon's metamorphosis in Issue #1 and he has quite a history. I know he's not the same Dragon we're reading now.

EL: No. Although visually he is very close to the one who appeared in Megaton comics. They're pretty much identical: they're both green, they're both big, they both have two toes and hairy arms, a fin on the head and that sort of thing. Still, storywise and in terms of the structure of the story, things have been refried and reorganized a lot since then.

BP: I know that you've explained this to folks before, but I was wondering if you could take us through a little bit of a chronology going back to your creation of the character as a kid. You've been drawing comics since you were a kid. Am I right?

EL: Yeah pretty much. I created The Dragon around fourth grade.

BP: Do you remember the conditions at all? Do you remember the moments of inspiration?

EL: Not really, because I always was drawing a lot. The thing is that whereas other kids seemed to do a lot of drawings

"I WAS INSPIRED BY WATCHING SPEED RACER AND I ALWAYS LIKED BATMAN COMICS AND STUFF LIKE THAT."

of just single illustrations, I've always drawn comics and even in fourth grade I would draw stories with panels and word balloons and everything else.

BP: Who was exciting to you back then? What comics were you looking at that got you excited?

EL: I don't know that I was really even reading comic books at that point. My dad had bought comics when he was a kid and so at some point he brought those out for us to look at and we kind of trashed a lot of them. He had the old EC stuff, a lot of the old Barks' comics and a good sized collection of Captain Marvel Adventures. So, a lot of the Dragon stuff actually came from Captain Marvel. I was inspired by watching Speed Racer and I always liked Batman comics and stuff like that. I really hadn't started collecting but I think there was a couple of comic books around the house either from my dad and maybe a book or two from my brother.

BP: Did you ever go back and look at those Speed Racer episodes? I remember them being amazing. I went back and looked at them now and they are really stiff.

EL: Yeah, they're pretty terrible. Actually, we didn't get Speed Racer where we lived. I first saw him when we were visiting my great grandmother for a week, each day I was there. I would tune in religiously, in the back of my head it was like, "Wow, that car was so cool!" So I came up with this Dragon guy and he drove a cool car like Speed Racer's car.

Barbaric, Ricochet, and the Dragon.

What I could remember was that it looked like a dragon head. He had a cape like Captain Marvel's and a cowl like Batman's with this green football helmet with scales on it and a fin on top. He had bell-bottom pants too. He was a real swinger. It was probably like '72 or so when he was created. It might have been earlier than that but at this point it seems like it was probably '72.

BP: You were going to send your early stuff to Charlton Bullseye at some point weren't you?

EL: Yeah. It took forever for anything to get done. Dragon started out as this guy who would say a magic word just like Shazam but he said "Fonti!"

BP: Why those words? Any reason?

EL: It was just the name of this wizard and it didn't mean anything. It just seemed like a cool thing to be saying and I don't even know why. The wizard was this guy in a purple robe with no face. It was sort of a blackened in area where his face was and there would be

little eyeballs peeping out. He was my mysterious wizard. He made it so that Flash Mercury could say the magic word and become the Dragon. That didn't last but a year and I think I only did as many five stories with the character. Then I switched over to a guy who changed physically from being a skinny guy to being the Dragon. He still wore a cape but now the cape was attached and was a consistent green. It was more like a Batman cape and then beyond the cape and cowl he was wearing gloves, a regular shirt and a regular belt. He also wore blue jeans and sneakers. He was pretty happening at that point and as time went on he grew a moustache, then a beard, and then his cape and bell-bottoms started to get all shredded. He's still wearing the bell-bottoms.

BP: That dates back to the Erik Larsen "ripping of the costume motif?"

EL: Yeah. It was about '75 or '76 that I did a story where he separated from William Johnson and they became two separate guys. The Dragon was, at that point, pretty much the guy he is now—green skin, the fin and semi-hairy arms. He sort of got hairy as I got hairy. We progressed together. He became 5'6" because I was 5 feet tall and I figured I'd reach 5'6". As I got taller, so did he. Eventually I settled on 5'10" but I continued to about 6'2"- 6'3".

BP: This is a side point, but I'm curious. How did you develop your unusual way of handling a pencil? It's something I wish we could do a series of sequential photographs to explain this to readers. How can you draw?

EL: I picked up a pencil that way as a little kid.

BP: How would you describe it? What fingers are holding the pencil, the thumb and your fourth finger?

EL: Basically, like if you were grabbing a pencil in your fist and just holding it with all four fingers curled over it. That's how you start the position. Then your pinky and ring finger wrap directly around the pencil. Your thumb and middle finger are underneath the pencil and your pointing finger is on top of the pencil at the end and it's used to pivot.

BP: All you readers and aspiring artists, please take note!

EL: Kids don't try this at home. (laughs)

BP: Erik will be doing a seminar at the LA Coliseum on this new approach.(laughs) You used that technique from the start?

EL: Forever. It was not anything that was developed on purpose. It just kind of happened.

BP: Did teachers bug you about that?

EL: Not enough.

BP: We were talking about the Dragon's chronology. Let's pick up at the point when you were going to submit to Charlton Comics. They were doing Charlton's Bullseye?

EL: Yeah.

BP: Was that the closest to the current incarnation of the Savage Dragon?

EL: It was just the way that the character was written and his way of being established then and it's maintained fairly well since then. The Charlton Bullseye story, which didn't make it into Charlton Bullseye, was later published as a fanzine.

BP: That was self-published?

EL: Yes it was.

BP: Graphic Fantasy?

EL: Yeah, we did it with a couple of friends, Kevin Keyes and Al Harris, both of whom have

"THE DRAGON WAS, AT THAT POINT, PRETTY MUCH THE GUY HE IS NOW—GREEN SKIN, THE FIN AND SEMI-HAIRY ARMS. HE SORT OF GOT HAIRY AS I GOT HAIRY. WE PROGRESSED TOGETHER. HE BECAME 5'6" BECAUSE I WAS 5 FEET TALL AND I FIGURED I'D REACH 5'6". AS I GOT TALLER, SO DID HE."

"SO AJAX COMICS PUT OUT A TOTAL OF FOUR COMIC BOOKS, GRAPHIC FANTASY #1, #2, #3 AND THEN PRISM #1 AND THAT WAS PRETTY MUCH IT FOR THEM. WE FOLDED UP SHOP AND WENT ELSEWHERE."

not gone on to doing comic books.

BP: Still buddies?

EL: Yeah pretty much. I still see them every now and then.

BP: I notice you dropping their names in the book every once in a while.

EL: We did the first issue together and I ran the story that was going to be in Charlton Bullseye in there. Then each of them wrote a story that was inked by me and the idea was that we would switch off after that. The next issue was all me and it was much shorter. The third was all Kevin and the fourth issue was delayed by Al because he was such a slug. We eventually changed the title of it to Prism, which is the name of his character. We did that as a one-shot because he couldn't finish the story himself. I drew the second half of it. So Ajax Comics put out a total of four comic books, Graphic Fantasy #1, #2, #3 and then Prism #1 and that was pretty much it for them. We folded up shop and went elsewhere.

BP: Then you went on to Megaton?

EL: At that point Gary Carlson, who is a decent writer, decided he wanted to put together his own comic book that would be everywhere and so he hired people who he'd either met personally or whose work he was aware of through different fanzines. He was a big collector of fanzines and he bought Graphic Fantasy through the mail, as did a few other people. He gave me a call, and we talked about doing some work together. Eventually, we created a character named Vanguard.

BP: I believe you said you are going to develop Vanguard for Image?

EL: Yeah.

BP: What's going on with that?

EL: That's pretty much Gary's baby and less mine. I'm acting more as editor on that job than actual writer/creator. I'm steering him in the direction that I'd like to see it go but I'm really not going to be doing any of the actual scripting or any of the actual drawing for the book. Gary's one of those guys who could very well have been a professional comic book writer had he pursued it. But for whatever reason he decided not to go at it and he's just kind of been kicking around doing his regular job.

BP: This will be a nice reintroduction to comics for him.

EL: Yeah it will and I'm looking forward to seeing him. What we're going to do is in the second issue of The Dragon...the backup in there will be Vanguard which will sort of introduce him to the Image universe.

BP: Who's going to be drawing that one?

EL: We're not really sure yet. There's a few different contenders.

BP: Would you like to drop any names?

EL: I don't think I'd better. Some of them are doing other stuff and might get in trouble. We'll leave that one be for now, but there's a lot of guys who are doing backups for that book and we'll just kind of look through

them and see who does the job the best and whose stuff looks real good and who can make the deadlines. We've got eight different backups that are sort of in the works being drawn by a lot of different people. It's pretty neat. I've always liked Gary's stuff and it's nice to be able to kind of pay him back for getting me in the door way back when.

BP: For Gary it's almost like winning the lottery. It's like, "Hey Gary, do a comic." He's going to step right on base.

EL: The weird thing is that it's a real role reversal. I used to be doing the comics and he would be the editor, keeping me on track and making sure that I was going in the right direction.

BP: Is it working out all right?

EL: It's working out fine. Gary's going at it. It's really

The assembled Freak Force Team.

"THE WEIRD THING IS THAT IT'S A REAL ROLE REVERSAL. I USED TO BE DOING THE COMICS AND [GARY CARLSON] WOULD BE THE EDITOR, KEEPING ME ON TRACK AND MAKING SURE THAT I WAS GOING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION."

"I DON'T WANT TO DO A COMIC THAT I WOULDN'T WANT TO BUY."

a matter of finding somebody who's dependable and appealing to do the series. I don't want to do a comic that I wouldn't want to buy. That's basically what it amounts to.

BP: Is that your motivation in general?

EL: Yeah.

BP: That's a good enough motivation. To continue with The Dragon chronology, I believe he next appeared in giant-sized mini-comics from Eclipse?

EL: It wasn't really a story as stories go. His next real appearance after Graphic Fantasy was in Megaton and in between those books there was some revision. There was a character that I killed off before Graphic Fantasy had begun and then I reintroduced in Megaton. And now that I'm doing this comic again I'm starting fresh, new again...it's all screwy.

BP: Just for the record for our readers, the early stuff doesn't necessarily relate to or enhance the experience of what they're reading right now. The mini-series and the ongoing story, for all intents and purposes, is the real Savage Dragon.

EL: Yeah. I guess the distinction there is that the old one is The Dragon, the current character is The *Savage* Dragon.

BP: The savagery does it. Let me ask you another question. Will the Dragon officially join the police force?

EL: He's part of the police force now.

BP: Will he be sworn in?

EL: I'm assuming that's already taken place off panel.

BP: Okay. Going back to the Freak Force...you said that they'll be introduced into The Dragon series.

EL: What they're going to be is more police officers. They'll be doing what the Dragon's doing.

BP: Is that right? So, he is going to be part of that posse?

EL: Yeah. He's going to realize that the job is a little bit too big for one guy to handle and

so it seems like what they should do is to get more people on the force to do what he's doing. It will make his job a hell of a lot easier.

BP: That's great. Is there a reincarnation of Mighty Man?

EL: Yeah, he will eventually be in Freak Force.

BP: Is there anyone else you can talk about that will be in Freak Force?

EL: Super Patriot, you've been introduced to already. The other characters in the group are Ricochet, who's a brand new character. In the first issue there's four different pinups and one of them has a group shot with a whole gang of guys. Several of those will be in Freak Force. There's a big, red-skinned guy whose name will be Barbaric...he'll be part of the group. There's a girl with blond hair whose name is Dart. And an electrical babe whose name is Rapture, as well as a woman called Horridus who will also be part of it. So it's a group of seven: Ricochet, Barbaric, Super Patriot, Dart, Mighty Man, Rapture and Horridus.

BP: I loved Super Patriot. Is he getting a one-shot or something in the future?

EL: Yeah.

BP: Do you know who is on that one yet?

EL: I'm talking to Dave Johnson about doing that. He's a relatively new guy who is a member of Gaijin Studios, which is like Adam Hughes and Brian Stelfreeze and all those guys.

BP: And Joe Phillips?

EL: Yeah, Joe Phillips. Dave's real good and he does that sort of high-tech stuff real well. I saw some of his work that was pretty neat, pretty high-tech and I thought this guy would be perfect for it. Rob [Liefeld] is going to be using Super Patriot in some of his stuff too..

BP: So Rob Haynes is doing a backup with Star?

EL: Yeah. It may very well lead into a one-shot or mini-series.

BP: Where did you first see Rob's work?

EL: I was sharing a studio with Al Gordon and he was inking some of Rob's work. So I ran into it then and I also met Rob down in San Diego last year.

BP: I've seen only small patches of Rob's work and what's interesting is that his work looks nothing like yours.

EL: Absolutely nothing.

BP: The guys you are picking are bringing a different style to the table.

EL: I don't really want to go out and just clone myself and get a whole bunch of stuff that looks the same. Basically, other people have strengths that I don't have and vice versa and for some of the characters I've created my strengths don't work well. You know, although I like Spider-Man, I didn't really think that Spider-Man was my style. I'm much more comfortable drawing a guy who's built like the Dragon.

BP: You had Spider-Man moving in some really strange positions.

EL: I tried to rise to the occasion, but I always thought I wasn't best at doing those lean characters. I was better at the beef and the mass and guys who when they punched each other went through 14 walls.

BP: Well that fight between Bedrock and Dragon was great. Very exciting!

EL: That's the stuff that I like to do. I like the explosive, Jack Kirby big stuff whereas Rob Haynes is more into the Steve Ditko, Gil Kane wirier guys. Or

"I DON'T REALLY WANT TO GO OUT AND JUST CLONE MYSELF AND GET A WHOLE BUNCH OF STUFF THAT LOOKS THE SAME."

the Paul Smithish mode which I can't really do all that well. Rob's more suited to doing a character like Star, even though I created the guy. I could see other people doing Super Patriot or Mighty Man. It's always neat to see somebody else's interpretation of your character.

Mighty Man from a backup story in Dragon #5. Written by: Erik Larsen. Art: David A. Williams and Karl Kesel.

BP: Now we're going to switch gears. I want to start speaking about Image. There seems to be a lot of misinformation going around. Do you want to put out the final word about what Image's agenda is?

EL: Generally what seems to be happening with a lot of information is that these guys are getting it second, third or even fourth hand. Peter David has our phone numbers as far as I know, but hasn't decided it's worth his time to give any of us a call to make sure that he knows what the hell he's talking about, so he spouts off in all sorts of different directions. A lot of the misinterpretation is just semantics. People say, "Would you like to come work for me or for Image," when it's not actually the case.

BP: Let's get specific...what's on the Image agenda for 1993? I know that it's already been announced that Wildstar will be out.

EL: Yeah, Wildstar will be out. Keith Giffen's also doing a book called Trencher.

BP: What's that one about?

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EL: I don't know that one as well as I'd like to. It's about a guy coming back from the dead...I think Keith was saying he's like a repo man from hell. He's repossessing souls and sending them back to hell. He's kind of going up against all sorts of bad guys.

BP: Well, that's a Giffen flavor for sure.

EL: Yeah he's got all sorts of really weird stuff. Some of the pages that I've seen have just been really wild. He's got this guy called the Nasal Python who is just like Medusa except it's the hair out of his nose that's really long and moving people all around. Only Keith could do this whacked out stuff.

BP: Are there any other projects that can be announced?

EL: As you know Tribe is coming out by [Larry] Stroman and Todd Johnson.

BP: Any Image crossovers planned for '93?

EL: Everything is so nebulous now that I would really hate to say definitely what's happening. I know we've been talking about doing some kind of company-wide crossover.

BP: I heard a rumor that Alan Moore was going to spearhead that? Is that true?

EL: I haven't heard anything about that. I know that his 1963 book will end up sort of coming into the Image universe at the end of it and some of our char-

acters will be involved, but at this point that's fairly far off and I'm not really sure just how it's going to work.

BP: How about the Jack Kirby project? I saw an announcement in the CBG that Jack Kirby would be doing a series or a one-shot?

EL: That's actually a fairly old job that Jack did, one of the last jobs he did before retiring. I think that might have even been like a licensing thing that fell

through. I'm not sure exactly about the genesis of it.

BP: Are you going to be inking a bunch of the pages?

EL: I'll be inking some and Rob's going to be inking several. All of us who want to be are going to be involved.

BP: Is that a limited series or a one-shot?

EL: I think it's three issues. It's a limited series and it's all penciled by Jack and in some cases the work had already been inked but it's going to be sort of returned to pencil form and re-inked and re-lettered by us.

BP: While we are on the subject of Jack Kirby, what does the comic book industry as a whole owe Jack Kirby? We wouldn't have much of the industry today without Jack Kirby. The foundation of the Marvel universe was laid by this man. Do you think the industry owes him anything or maybe Marvel in particular?

EL: I think Marvel in particular might very well.

BP: Let's just pay Kirby two million dollars a year for what he's done up until now.

EL: I think we all come into this industry with our eyes somewhat open. I knew when I came to Marvel that what I was doing was work for hire. I was fully aware that they were going to be doing T-shirts using art from covers that I had drawn and I wasn't going to get paid a dime for those T-shirts. I knew that coming in, that was part of what had gone on before me, and yet I worked there. Do they owe me anything more than that? Well, what the hell. I'd like to get some cash for those T-shirts, but I knew that I wasn't going to be getting that. I assume that Jack, when he got into this business and began working for Marvel, knew that he wasn't going to own his work and that he wasn't going to be able to do anything about that. Morally should Marvel cough up some money? Maybe so. It would certainly be a nice thing to do. Legally are they obliged to? It

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seems not. My guess is that they probably won't do anything like that...but that's mighty Marvel. We're not going to be making money with this project we're doing with Jack, we're volunteering our time. This is a payback to Jack. We're going to be inking pages, lettering, and getting the book colored and out and it's basically a benefit book for the cause of Jack Kirby. We feel as a group that we owe him something.

BP: Not so long ago, Image made a break from Malibu Comics who was doing a lot of the listing, advertisement and bill collecting. Why did Image make the break from Malibu?

EL: I think it was inevitable. When we got together in the beginning, our first inclination was why don't we just do this ourselves and we won't have any of the potential headaches of working with another company. At the time, for the sake of getting things going and getting the books out on the shelves, it was easier to go with Malibu Comics and have them do that than to do it ourselves. Had we spent the time to form the company and get everything in place, the books probably would have never come out last summer. They probably would have been later than that. We just, at that point, were really in that creative mode of, "well, we've got to get going, let's get these books out."

BP: A lot of you guys came right off of monthlies, and then, as mentioned in one of your editorials, you were faced with the task of laying an entire foundation for every one of your books and then a universe. Was that a pretty daunting task?

EL: Yeah and there's a lot of aspects to this work that people don't realize. I never saw color proofs before from the separators. I've never had to go over those and find all the dis-colored boots and gloves and ears. Then reviewing everything with colorists. I've never had to do any of this and suddenly I'm finding that two or three days

out of each month are spent going over some of the details. That eats into your time. The getting together to make decisions on a lot of different little things takes up a lot of time. Every little T-shirt that you see out there, somebody has got to put that together and that's us. When you go to a convention, and think "Well, I want to be giving out posters." How are you going to be giving out posters? Who will get them printed? Well, I guess it's us. Who's going to do the overlays? Who's going to do paste up for buttons to pin on your shirt? Who's going to do this, that and the other thing? Well, it's all of us!

BP: Image was founded by seven original members. Now you are expanding and taking on additional projects. Is there an Image central and how does that work? How do the founding members support that mechanism?

EL: There is an Image office and it's in Anaheim, California. We've got some people doing paste up and stuff like that. It's coming together but it's a slow process.

BP: Now that you're taking on new projects and professionals are submitting their work to you, how do you make a decision on whether you're going to do a project or not?

EL: It's pretty much a straight vote.

BP: Seven guys vote whether or not they like the project?

EL: Yeah, that's basically it. Some people have come to us with really nothing. They think based on their name alone they can do a book but in very few cases would that fly.

BP: You really have to see a full-blown proposal.

EL: Yeah for the most part everybody has done a proposal.

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"...FOR THE RUNNING OF THE OFFICE AND HIRING PEOPLE WE PUT MONEY INTO THE KITTY OURSELVES. WE'RE A LITTLE TIRED OF COMPANIES WITH THAT GRAB IT ALL, KEEP IT ALL MENTALITY."

At this point, we need the specifics simply to avoid some repetition. I mean there's already been some of that anyway. There are three team books who have lead characters who essentially look the same. Shaft looks pretty much like the guy from WILDC.A.T.S. and the guy from Cyberforce. That sort of thing can be headed off at the pass if we could get specifics beforehand. There's 50,000 different warring alien factors up there.

BP: Once Image takes on a book, do you advance these folks money or are they expected to fund their own project?

EL: Basically, the seven founding members, set it up so that we don't make any money off anyone else's book...period.

BP: Is there a certain amount of money that goes to Image central?

EL: That's just for the overhead...for the running of the office and hiring of people but we put money into the kitty ourselves. We're a little tired of companies with that grab it all, keep it all mentality.

BP: There is profit to be made in comics.

EL: There definitely is, but if we want that profit, we do our books. Essentially any books I do, be it Vanguard or Mighty Man or Super Patriot or whatever, those decisions are made entirely by me. I decide what I want to pay people, what the royalties split is and everything on down the line. It's all negotiated between me and whomever's writing, penciling, inking, coloring and lettering. We have found that our upfront rates are better than anybody else's rates.

BP: Yeah I've heard of some incredible rates.

EL: It's a great time to be a creative person right now.

BP: Yes, it is. When I heard about the formation of the Image universe, it was a great feeling to see people being able to follow their passion and be compensated for it. I wouldn't be surprised to see more companies like Image popping up in the future.

EL: One of the reasons we as a company can keep from strangling each other and maintain what we've got as a group is that we own nothing of each other's work. We're not taking from anybody else and so there's nothing really to argue over.

BP: I know that Savage Dragon will be appearing in Shadowhawk and Wildstar, do you get a royalty or don't you care in that instance?

EL: No I don't.

BP: So everybody gets the free rein?

EL: What happens in the group is that no one can play with anyone else's toys without asking. We decided in the very beginning that it would get too complicated. What if the Dragon shows up in somebody's book for two panels? Are we going to count that as an appearance? And how much is two panels worth? How are you going to start measuring how much space people take up on the cover or whether their logos are there? It gets to be ridiculous.

BP: One thing that's come through in the comic press, is that Image feels less like a corporate structure. There is more of a sense that this is the tree fort the guys have in the backyard and they are following their dream and enjoying it.

EL: That's pretty much it. We think of it as a big sandbox. And we get to pick which kids we want to have play in our sandbox and who we want to loan our toys to.

BP: We're going to switch gears again. We're going to go through your professional career. What was your first totally professional gig?

EL: That would be Megaton #1.

BP: What were some of the projects that led you to the Doom Patrol, some of the other work you had done at DC? Is that the right chronology?

EL: First I did some work at Megaton Comics for a short period of time but began to send stuff out to every publisher that I could think of. Then I worked for Bill Black's AC Comics for about a year.

"WE THINK OF IT AS A BIG SANDBOX. AND WE GET TO PICK WHICH KIDS WE WANT TO HAVE PLAY IN OUR SANDBOX AND WHO WE WANT TO LOAN OUR TOYS TO."

BP: I saw that Bill Black placed an ad in Savage Dragon #3.

EL: Yeah. Some of that stuff was quite awful.

BP: You used to work at AC?

EL: I did Sentinels of Justice and Lord knows what else.

Art from the cover of SuperPatriot #2. Dave Johnson

"I DID SENTINELS OF JUSTICE AND LORD KNOWS WHAT ELSE. IT WAS ALL FAIRLY BAD."

It was all fairly bad. I didn't feel at that point that it was the right work for my particular strengths. I was fairly insecure and just getting started, but it did teach me how to do pages rather quickly.

BP: I guess it didn't have that Erik Larsen kick to it yet.

EL: For the most part, it was fairly non-action oriented, and at that point all my stuff had going for it was that there was a certain power to it. What it ended up being was a lot of bad drawing.

BP: Where did you go from there?

EL: I moved onto DNAgents. I went up to a con in Victoria and that's where I first met Todd [McFarlane]. He was drawing Infinity Inc. and had just done his first Marvel job. He did an issue of Spitfire and the Troubleshooters. In three days, it was proof that he could get this stuff done. Todd is a hell of a guy. I had just driven up to go to the convention. It was a weekend show and we got to talking and after a while he goes, "I don't know what kind of room they put me up in, but if you don't have a place to crash, you're welcome to crash over there." I also met some of the guys at DC for the first time. Mike Gold saw my stuff at that show.And I met Mark Evanier who was doing DNAgents. Then I met some people from Comico.

BP: That was a profitable show.

EL: It worked out pretty well and shortly after that I did the DNAgents. I did five issues. In the middle of the DNAgents work, I did an issue of Secret Origins, which was the Mike Gold connection.

BP: Which origin did you do?

EL: Nightwing. It was awful.

BP: Who inked that issue?

EL: It was inked by Mike DeCarlo and Mike destroyed me. I don't like to say that, but he did do a terrible job. There's a lot of inkers whose agenda seems to be to make it the best ink job that they've ever done, but not necessarily the best pencil job that the penciler had done. I was really kind of dismayed that he had changed the faces and changed the look of the work so much. He was just basically an embellisher. Embellishers tend to change a

lot of stuff. There's a lot of inkers in the business who do that sort of thing. They're not the types that I ever want to work with, but that's what he did. When the book finally came out it was almost the feeling of, "God, who did this book? Oh it's me! What a surprise." Then I did a fill-in on Amazing Spider-Man around that same time and that was sort of a nightmare job.

BP: What issue was that?

EL: I think #287.

BP: Who was the inker on that one?

EL: Art Nichols. He was a little more faithful to my pencils.

BP: Why do you say it was a nightmare job?

EL: It just needed to be done so quickly.

BP: Oh, so no sleep for five days?

EL: Well, at that point, I still didn't have great speed. A lot of the problem when you're first starting out, is that you don't know how to draw that well. You need to fix your work and redraw the panel again and again. I think that job took two weeks, but at that point the fastest I had done anything was maybe a month. Plus it was so plot-heavy that I needed to do tons of panels. I couldn't open it up at all.

BP: It was really hard for your style to come through, huh?

EL: It was tough and the story was really bone headed too. Actually, I started out writing my own stuff and had written for Graphic Fantasy. When I came over to Megaton I co-plotted the first couple and issues, three and four I wrote myself. I was used to doing the writing. At one point, I had approached Eclipse about doing some work for them and had sent them some samples. They

From the splash page of Dragon #2, Dart from Freak Force.

didn't really think that I would ever make it as an artist but I had tremendous potential as a writer.

BP: The first time I had seen your writing was Spider-Man #15 with the mutant factor and when that came out I thought that it was polished.

EL: I've always had a fairly good ear for natural sounding dialogue and that's something that I think a lot of people have a lot of trouble with.

BP: You make that jump from the natural sounding dialogue to the sort of necessary comic book style dialogue.

EL: Well ,thanks. At that point I was doing the DNAgents as well as Spider-Man and Secret Origins on the side. I guess DNA was fairly far ahead, at least it had a few months lead time. Mark was making sure that it would maintain that kind of extended lead time, so we weren't all rushed. So when I ended up doing fill-ins for other people, I could actually take the time to do it. At some point Mark called me up and said that DNAgents looked like it was going to fold. He suggested that I might want to move on one of these days and do some of this other stuff since DNAgents' sales weren't looking that great. Eclipse was being real good in that they didn't know what effect I was going to have on the book, if any, and were willing to wait a few months if I wanted to wrap things up and see if my artwork helped the book or hurt.. At that point I had enough other gigs going on that I said let's just cancel it. We'll draw this thing to a close and that'll be the end.

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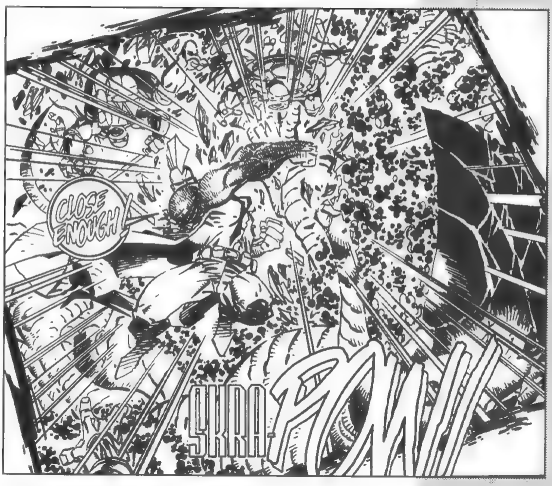
The Dragon and the Turtles.

BP: So what came next?

EL: Various jobs at DC. Mike Gold had an agenda to get me on the Teen Titans. Marv [Wolfman], wasn't really aware of that. Then when I mentioned to [George] Perez at one point that it looked like I was going to be doing some Titan stuff, he acted kind of surprised. At that point he was going to be going back to the book and it was like, "Oh wow, really, well this is news to me." I think what Mike had in mind was to get me on that book and I did end up doing issue #33. I kept kicking around from book to book,...I did a couple issues of The Outsiders and to keep me busy they did Doom Patrol meets the Suicide Squad.

BP: The crossover?

EL: It was originally done as two separate issues that could either run as two issues of the Doom Patrol or as two issues of the Suicide Squad or both but it would be one issue of each continuing into each other. It also looked as though Steve Lightle wouldn't be able to continue doing Doom Patrol. I don't think Steve was real happy with the writing in the book. It wasn't the Doom Patrol that he was used to reading. Since he wasn't too crazy about it, there were some delays in completing the book, he took a little bit longer than he should have and, for whatever reason,



there was some friction so they got me to do the book.

BP: That wild look to your work really started kicking in because you had so many bizarre characters to draw.

EL: A lot of the fun in drawing that book was the liberties I was suddenly allowed to take.

BP: Is that right?

EL: Well, I have always bitched about writing in comics. I've never found myself in a situation where I thought the writing was fantastic. This goes back to that Name Withheld letter that I wrote. The letter wasn't really written from my point of view but from two or three different people's point of view. You know Rob and Todd and others who I had talked to were getting the same feeling of frustration that I was having. Rob would create a character and then for whatever reason the higher-ups would decide, "Well did you know that he has a healing factor?" Well it wasn't Rob's intention that he should have a healing factor.

BP: You find that stifling after a while. You give birth to something and then it gets squashed or changed.

EL: Yeah. I don't know how much Rob wants me to say about any of this but his original intention for Cable was that Cable was Cannonball as a adult. As much as Rob tried to draw people different from each other, he was trying to make Cable and Cannonball look very much like the same person.

BP: They have the same hairline, right?

EL: Yeah as time goes on. They both still have that little lock of hair. Clearly he didn't get to do

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"THE REASON IS THAT THOSE OF US WHO ENJOY WRITING AND WANT TO WRITE, THINK THAT WE CAN DO A JOB AS WELL AS MOST OF THE PEOPLE WHO ARE WRITING COMIC BOOKS. IT'S THAT MOST OF THE PEOPLE WRITING COMIC BOOKS DO A REALLY CRAPPY JOB AND IT'S NOT A REAL POLITE OR NICE THING TO SAY. THERE'S A LOT OF PEOPLE IN THE BUSINESS DOING A CRUMMY JOB."

what he wanted to do and all of us have felt a certain amount of frustration in that. A lot of the work that I wanted to do, I just plain didn't because of that whole, "Well if you do this for us then we own it and we can do what we want attitude." I could have done The Dragon for Marvel or DC and if they're unhappy with me then issue #2 I'm kicked off the book and a whole new creative team is in there doing whatever the hell they want to. I don't really have any say in the matter.

BP: I noticed when you did your run on Spider-Man, you were using all Marvel characters. And Todd MacFarlane, when he was doing his run on Spider-Man, there were all Marvel villains. Is this when you began talking about Image?

EL: We were talking towards the end there. I know in the Mutant Factor story I introduced some new characters and I introduced some stuff in the Marvel Comics Presents story that I wrote and drew. But I killed 'em all off...

BP: And so the Name Withheld letter grew out of that frustration?

EL: Yeah. It kind of danced around some of the subjects that I really didn't want to come right out and say. The reason is that those of us who enjoy writing and want to write, think that we can do a job as well as most of the people who are writing comic books. It's that most of the people writing comic books do a really crappy job and it's not a real polite or nice thing to say. There's a lot of people in the business doing a crummy job. Nobody likes to hear that sort of thing. But, I have to say it, as an artist drawing the story where Scorpion is confronting J. Johah Jameson for the 40th time and going through the same crap again and again. My inclination would be to wrap up that storyline and get on with it. I might have Spider-Man and Scorpion and J. Johah Jameson, in the same room having the most intense conversation of all time. Just get it out in the air and settled for now. Scorpion, what's your deal? How come you're pissed off at this guy? Well, he paid me to get superpowers from some place and now I'm a criminal all because of him. Well, did he force you to rob the bank? No, but he did give me super-powers. There's a lot of people who'd like superpowers, what's your bitch about having super-powers? You don't even have to use them if you don't want to use them. You could just wear regular clothes. There was a time when he would be stuck in his costume which is another ridiculous Marvel Comic situation. You know the Rhino, he's been stuck in his costume for years. How do you function? You can't function in those things, but in Marvel Comics nobody has to go to the bathroom. But in the real world, which these things are pretending to be part of, that sort of thing doesn't work at all.

BP: You grew up reading comics and after a period of time, did you start seeing these cycles and the same storylines? Did you ever ask what's new in 1993?

EL: I really think that it opens up so many more doors to get on to the next story. You might as well do it because it's cool once you get past those little barriers.

BP: It will probably keep readers around for a longer period of time. I've read that kids read comics for around three years and then move on. Maybe by pushing the envelope constantly, we can keep the readers around a lot longer. What do you think?

EL: I don't see why not. I don't want to draw the same stories that I've drawn before. I don't want to write the same stories that I've written before. I don't really understand the mentally that wants to.

BP: Any final words on the Name Withheld letter? At the very least, it has sparked about a year's worth of reactions...

EL: ...and heated debate. Most of it is complete and utter misinterpretation. Some of it was not caused directly by me at all. Don and Maggie Thompson pulled a headline from that saying `Artist says to writers "we don't need you."' I didn't say artists don't need writers. Artists say to Mike W. Barr we don't need you. I could use a good writer. Todd could use a good writer. All of us would love to work with writers who've got new ideas, original ideas, innovative ideas, that are engaging. What we don't want to do is the same shit again, and again, and again, and again. Mike got off on all sorts of tangents.

BP: Yeah he and Byrne just continue to...

EL: Yeah he and Byrne yada, yada, yada. Mike W. Barr thinks that as half the writing team he should get half of the dough and that the artist team should get the other half of the dough. My solution to this whole rigmarole is instead of a fixed royalty system which exists today, let's have a flexible royalty system. Then what will happen is a writer will say, "I think I deserve 50%" but he'll get an artist who is willing to give him 50%. What he's going to find is that in order to get somebody who's decent he's going to have to give a little. He might not be

Larsen's back-up story, ***Rapture and Ricochet****, Art by Adam Hughes.*

"ALL OF US WOULD LOVE TO WORK WITH WRITERS WHO'VE GOT NEW IDEAS, ORIGINAL IDEAS, INNOVATIVE IDEAS, THAT ARE ENGAGING. WHAT WE DON'T WANT TO DO IS THE SAME SHIT AGAIN, AND AGAIN, AND AGAIN, AND AGAIN."

able to get 50%. Let's take Camelot 3000 for example. Brian Boland did a knock out job on that book. He spent a lot of time doing it, obviously, since the book was so delayed. The end result was Mike W. Barr being paid- a lot more money than Brian Boland.

Part of the cover to Vanguard #0, Art: Tomm Coker and Jim Sinclair

BP: I never knew that.

EL: The royalty split at DC at that time was that the writer got 50% and the penciler and inker together would get the same as the writer. Brian would spend eight months penciling an issue and would get the same pay or less than the guy who ended up scripting it overnight. Is that an equitable situation?

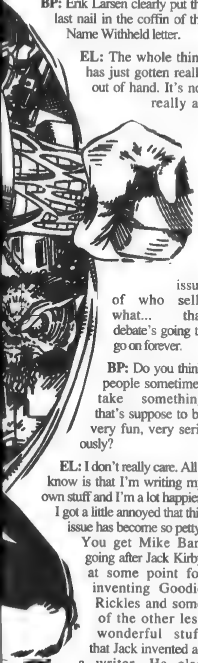
I don't think so.

BP: I would have to say that what sells the comic book is the artwork. That's going to get me letters, I'm sure, would you agree that there's very few writers that are going to sell a lot of books?

EL: Well there's certainly stuff that writers can do. Writers affect the look of the book a lot simply by what they write. If I'm writing that there's two guys talking in a room, it's going to be a far different visual story than two guys kicking the crap out of each other.

BP: Erik Larsen clearly put the last nail in the coffin of the Name Withheld letter.

EL: The whole thing has just gotten really out of hand. It's not really an issue of who sells what... that debate's going to go on forever.



BP: Do you think people sometimes take something that's suppose to be very fun, very seriously?

EL: I don't really care. All I know is that I'm writing my own stuff and I'm a lot happier. I got a little annoyed that this issue has become so petty. You get Mike Barr going after Jack Kirby at some point for inventing Goodie Rickles and some of the other less wonderful stuff that Jack invented as a writer. He also invented some really cool stuff as a writer. Nobody came out and said, "Well, gee Mike W. Barr you came up with Duke of Oil and Nuclear Family and a whole bunch of incredibly stupid, poorly conceived idiotic ideas from that horrible Outsiders crap that you were trying to foist on the comic book reading public at large." That stuff's horrible. I don't go out of my way to buy it. A lot of it seems pretty silly and poorly conceived, but he's certainly entitled to his opinion and if he thinks he's God's gift to comics, he's certainly welcome to that opinion. The number of jobs he's been offered and the number of good quality artists who are demanding to work with him are certainly evidence of that. Enough said.

BP: Lets go back to your work on Doom Patrol. Did you have a little more freedom at this point in time.

EL: First of all, they asked me right away what I wanted to do and what characters I'd like to introduce and that sort of thing. That was kind of nice to be able to start that way. I had a character called Shrapnel that I wanted to get into comics right away. At one point I had talked to Mark Evanier about putting Shrapnel in the DNAgents and I even talked to Marv briefly about doing him in the Teen Titans. Both of them wanted to change the character in some way. Mark thought that if the shrapnel flying off his body was a suit then he could work that into the DNAgents' universe. I couldn't live with that because it changed him completely. Marv had another idea which could have been done, but we ended up doing him in the Doom Patrol. My stipulation coming into it was let's do this as a one part story where he just comes in and out. I don't want to do his origin. I drew the first story and at the end of the story it said next issue more of Shrapnel plus his origin. So we went back and forth on that a little bit and he came up with an origin for him that I thought was pretty

"THE WHOLE [NAME WITHHELD LETTER] THING HAS JUST GOTTEN REALLY OUT OF HAND. IT'S NOT REALLY AN ISSUE OF WHO SELLS WHAT... THAT DEBATE'S GOING TO GO ON FOREVER."

"...I DID THE FIRST [PUNISHER] ISSUE, THEN AGREED TO DO IT ON AN ON-GOING BASIS, BUT GREW TO DISLIKE IT WITH EVERY PASSING ISSUE. HE'S ONE OF THOSE ONE DIMENSIONAL CHARACTERS THAT I DON'T REALLY ENJOY."

dumb...he was a kid with bad acne and to get rid of it he...Oh brother, it didn't work for me. In any case that origin never showed up because that one was smashed by me.

BP: Go to work, dude!

EL: I wouldn't have drawn it otherwise. There were still times where I was willing to flex what little muscle I had. I did get to do some creative rearranging, but with the permission of the writer and the editor. A plot would come in and we'd sort of talk about it and wonder whether we had done a similar story perhaps two issues ago. Or let's change this to make this sequence more exciting because it isn't working. In one of the issues they had Robot Man's brain up in a spaceship and somehow he ended up using his brain power to run the ship and I thought that just seemed really idiotic that his brain was being held captive and he was able to do that. So we did some rewriting, where it ended up somebody else blew up the engines, and a character lost a contact lens. A lot of wacky stuff was just me having some fun with what was there and being given a certain amount of leeway. We had all talked back and forth so it all wasn't hopefully coming to the writer as a complete surprise.

Larsen's Mighty Man, the back-up story from Savage Dragon #3.

BP: I'll go on record as saying pound for pound you and McFarlane are the guys to beat for outrageous page layouts. Is this when we see a lot of Erik Larsen really kicking in?

EL: Yeah, well I'm trying to have some fun.

BP: Any final words on the Doom Patrol?

EL: It was a fun thing, a fun experiment that I was glad to be a part of. I liked some of the characters. The biggest reason that I quit the book was that a) my contract was up and b) there were a couple of characters that he was planning to kill off that I enjoyed drawing.

BP: Who were they?

EL: One was Scott Fischer and the other, I believe, was Arani. Celsius I think was her superhero name. I really enjoyed drawing those characters. So when they planned to kill them off, I thought I'd rather be doing other stuff.

BP: Did Amazing Spider-Man come next?

EL: The Punisher came next.

BP: Any fond memories of the Punisher?

EL: None whatsoever.

BP: You just had an ill feeling for it? It was a job, not an adventure.

EL: Yeah, I did the first issue, then agreed to do it on an on-going basis, but grew to dislike it with every passing issue. He's one of those one-dimensional characters that I don't really enjoy.

BP: Did you feel like a piano player playing the same note over and over?

EL: It's like Venom. Venom is such a one dimensional character and they do so little with him that I just kind of have to say deal me out, this is too simple-minded for me to be working with. Punisher wasn't my style. Some of the grittiness that I'm putting in The Dragon I got

from doing that book so it was a good experience.

BP: The Dragon handles a gun fairly well, doesn't he?

EL: Yeah, because the Dragon never, in any of the things I've ever done, even came anywhere near a gun so that's a little different for this book. The Punisher was never a book that I ever really wanted to do. Actually none of them were. I wanted to do the Hulk. I wanted to do the FF.

BP: Wouldn't the FF have been awesome?

EL: When Walt Simonson left the book I put in a proposal to do it. Valentino also put in a proposal. I don't think I'd written anything up but at least I talked with the editor, neither of us got the assignment though.Tom DeFalco did, but I don't know why.

BP: Was Amazing Spider-Man next?

EL: I was hired to do a series of short stories from Marvel Comic Presents. What had gotten approved was a Nova mini-series. I reintroduced the character, gave him his powers back and sort of re-established him. I actually did layouts and scripted the first three and had detailed plots for the other two parts of it and then that character was suddenly scooped up to be put into the New Warriors. I had quit the Punisher to do that, so suddenly I was saying, "Hey, wait a minute I quit this to do this and now I don't have this anymore." I was calling up [Terry] Kavanaugh asking, "what else have you got?" He had asked me before that if I was interested in doing this Excalibur serial, which I wasn't really interested in doing because I didn't read Excalibur or particularly like the characters. So I did it, it turned out okay and Terry Austin inked it. I always wanted to have Terry ink some stuff.

BP: Did he get all noodley on your stuff?

EL: I've always been kind of hesitant penciling because inkers I had worked with varied to some degree on what they were able to do with their own skill, what they could ink and turn stuff into the kind of lines that they could handle. At one point I had stripped my style down so that there was no real rendering at all, it was pretty much black and white. An example would be the early Doom Patrol stuff or the last issue of The Outsiders. It was my Keith Giffen mode. So I was able to do a lot of stuff and Ter-

" VENOM IS SUCH A ONE-DIMENSIONAL CHARACTER AND THEY DO SO LITTLE WITH HIM THAT I JUST KIND OF HAVE TO SAY DEAL ME OUT, THIS IS TOO SIMPLE-MINDED FOR ME TO BE WORKING WITH."

ry can ink anything and make it look beautiful. Every time I would do another story, I'd go "wow, you inked that last part really cool." Terry's really good. Towards the end of doing that particular job Jim Salicrup needed someone to do a fill-in for Todd on Amazing Spider-Man. The bi- weeklies were catching up with Todd at that point. So I did Amazing Spider-Man #324 that featured Solo, who had never been drawn before. I created the visual for Solo. The previous issue which introduced Solo hadn't really been drawn.

Phyllis from a Mighty Man back-up in Savage Dragon #3. Art: Victor Bridges and Terry Austin.

"JIM SALICRUP NEEDED SOMEONE TO DO A FILL-IN FOR TODD ON AMAZING SPIDER-MAN. THE BI-WEEKLIES WERE CATCHING UP WITH TODD AT THAT POINT. SO I DID AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #324..."

BP: Oh weird. So the issue before had to conform to your visual in the next issue?

EL: Yeah. So Todd's been following my version of Solo. It's kind of weird actually. I was up at Todd's place shortly after I had done my issue and I helped him pencil some things here and there. I was drawing in Solo's costumes in a few panels and drawing a few little things here and there that he was inking. So that was kind of neat.

BP: And then what happened?

EL: I knew Salicrup was looking for someone to do Amazing Spider-Man on a regular basis and it was between me and a couple other people. I'm not really sure who else was up for the job, but I did another fill-in and at that point he said that I could do the book on a regular basis.

BP: Wow, it's that easy, huh?

EL: Yeah, it started with #329 and then it was matter of trying to find somebody who could ink it. For the most part, I picked the inkers on Spider-Man as I did them.

BP: What's the secret behind your success? What do you do to give your layouts such visual pizzazz?

EL: I just try to make them visually interesting to look at.

Brian Pulido is the creator and publisher of CHAOS! COMICS! his first series EVIL ERNIE: THE RESURRECTION made it's debut in May. In addition, Brian is the writer and creator of several new series, RACK & PAIN, DETONATOR and THE CRAWLER coming from Dark Horse in fall of 1993. When he's not tied to his keyboard, Brian enjoys speed metal, stage diving and rave parties.

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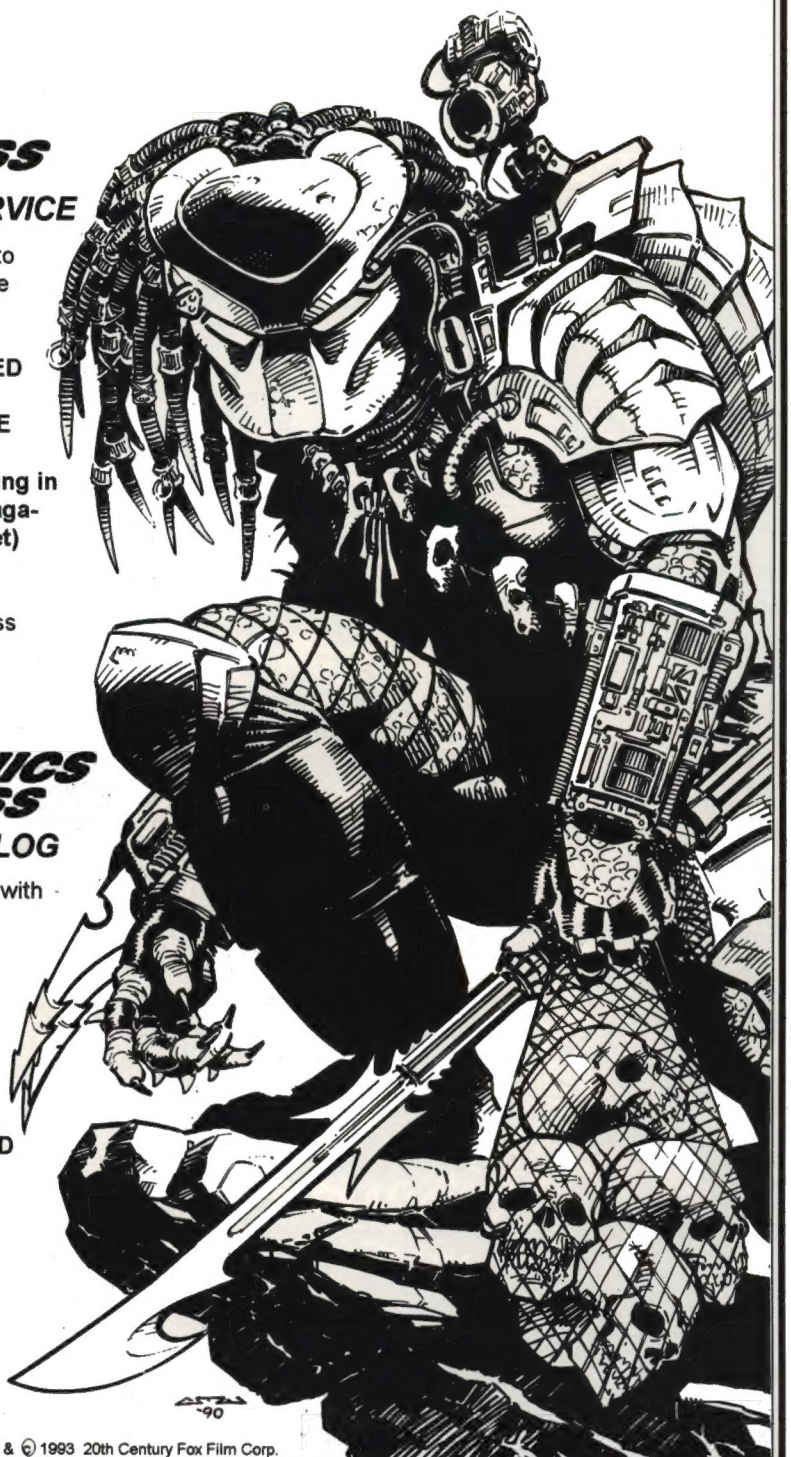

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